Tender like a bruise

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/47884612.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Will Graham Finds Out, and gets shitfaced instead of dealing with it, Vomiting, Drinking, Non-Graphic Violence, Endless levels of patience on Hannibal's end
Language:	English
Series:	Part 13 of June of Doom
Stats:	Published: 2023-06-15 Words: 2,472 Chapters: 1/1

Tender like a bruise

by BumblebeesAndDandelions

Summary

Confronted with the truth of what Hannibal is, Will would much rather get blackout drunk than deal with it.

Notes

June 14 - | Fight |

The bar Will chose was crowded, full of young, cheerful drunks and people already half passed out in the booths. They were a balm to his mind, sugary, almost sickenly sweet compared to the mind of their most recent killer. He gestured to the bartender, getting another refill of his whiskey.

This killer was pedestrian in his targets, rageful in his methods. He targeted wayward teens, the homeless, people wandering home drunk. And then he took them to abandoned places and tore them apart, ripped them limb from limb sometimes, sometimes he'd start skinning them before growing bored and carving them up. Violent and bloody, the scenes were full of rage and disgust. They made Will's teeth ache with the need to sink them into something, made him want to bloody himself in a fight.

So he was drinking, and skimming the emotions of the laughing customers beside him in an effort to cool the thing inside him. It was well past midnight, and he'd passed too much about five drinks ago, and would feel it in the morning, but for now it was working, the killer was quiet.

He'd be back on the case tomorrow, regardless of the size of his hangover. This case was public, people were scared, and Jack was desperate to find the killer. He wondered idly if he could just leave his phone here, grab it from the lost and found the next day. It would save him from being woken up at dawn by a call, but Jack, or someone he sent, would be pounding on his door within the hour anyway. He groaned, already exhausted at the prospect of waking up tomorrow, and slid off his stool, swaying as he left.

Fuck, he was drunk. He'd have to call a cab. He wanted to call Hannibal. No he didn't, Hannibal was bad, and he had to stay away from him, even if he hadn't been able to convince himself to arrest the man.

There were no cabs. His awful, shitty phone wouldn't download the uber app, and he lived an hour away from here by car, so he couldn't walk. Hannibal would help. The man was a saint, if Will ignored his extracurricular activities. He'd probably come as soon as Will called, offer some fancy coffee from some European country, and a late night snack made of people to help soak up the alcohol. A tiny, whiny voice inside his head, one that dearly wanted the bed that Hannibal would surely offer, pointed out that it wouldn't be the first time Will had been served human by Hannibal, wouldn't be the first time he'd enjoyed it.

Or Will could buy a hotel room for the night, and continue avoiding the man. Hannibal might not know for sure that Will knew, but he had to know Will was avoiding him, and given their relationship, there were few things Hannibal could have done to elicit this reaction from Will. Hell, Will had barely reacted when he'd realized Hannibal was trying to isolate him from literally everyone else in his life, hadn't put up a fight when Hannibal literally made him the guardian of a girl whose father he had killed.

Even now, knowing that Hannibal was a killer, knowing he'd been fed the organs of his victims, he couldn't arrest him. It wasn't loyalty, really, that stayed his hand. It didn't feel like that, at least. He was loyal to Jack, to the FBI. It wasn't a lack of care, either. He felt the deaths of all of those victims, seen their pain and terror. He genuinely wanted to bring killers

to justice, to protect people and do the right thing. But with Hannibal, it wasn't the people he'd killed that hurt, it was the feeling of betrayal. He felt hurt that Hannibal had kept it from him, pulled the wool over his eyes just like everyone else. He was the butt of Hannibal's private jokes as much as anyone else, every time the man served him dinner, or brought breakfast to his motel room. He'd been feeding Will people and laughing at how clever he was, that he'd fooled the best and brightest at the FBI.

Will had already known his paddle was dangerous, drawing him into deeper and deeper waters instead of helping him to shore. That didn't help him from feeling this way. Maybe it was friendship that stayed his hand, but Will couldn't trust anything Hannibal had claimed to feel for him, so maybe it wasn't.

What was stopping him? He had his phone in hand, he could call Jack right now. He wouldn't believe him, of course, but Hannibal would bring someone food eventually, they could test it and it would be human, and he'd be arrested. He'd be gone, behind bars, and Will would have betrayed him. Maybe it was loyalty keeping Will from doing anything, because the thought of betraying Hannibal, of seeing the man locked away, made him sick to his stomach. He couldn't lose Hannibal, and he hated himself for that weakness.

He texted Hannibal his location, too drunk to drive, and shoved his phone back in his pocket before he could second guess.

Maybe they wouldn't have to talk about it. Will could pass it off as feeling antisocial, or say this new case was taking more out of him then expected, and they could go on like they had before. Hannibal, playing with everyone from his place above them, Will, the only puppet desperately aware of his strings, and playing along anyway.

No. He couldn't do that. What he wanted was to forget, not to remain a plaything. If he couldn't do either, and he couldn't arrest him, what else was there?

Hannibal was an asshole, he didn't care about others, Will had known that as soon as he'd met him. Even the care he'd shown Will could have been fake, for all Will knew. He wouldn't change, wouldn't stop. If Will let him keep playing, let himself be a plaything despite it all, he'd be tossed aside eventually. That- that couldn't happen. Will wouldn't let that happen. He'd told Hannibal once that abandonment required expectation, that he'd never been abandoned. If Hannibal left, if he got bored, and moved on to some other person, some other place, then he'd be abandoning Will.

A car pulled up in front of him, sleek and black. Hannibal. He glared belligerently at the car, his drunk mind stuck on the idea of Hannibal abandoning him. He still climbed into the car.

"Will," Hannibal smiled at him, a tiny quirk of the lips. He was happy that Will had called him. Asshole.

Hannibal blinked, tilting his head, and fuck, Will had said that outloud.

"I believe you were correct in your assessment , you appear quite drunk. I live much closer than you, if you would, I would be more than happy to offer my guest room to you for the night."

Of course he'd brush Will's misstep aside, of course he'd offer his luxurious guest bed that probably had a mint on the pillow because Hannibal was just like that. If he'd been sober, he might have been grateful. As he was, he wanted to punch Hannibal, knock the person suit right off and see what was underneath.

"D'you ever see those videos of… lambs and dogs, or snakes and mice, and they're all friendly, and think 'wonder how long that'll last?'" Drunk, his accent thickened his words, widening the vowels. He let his head loll slightly against the headrest, watching the rain hit the windshield as Hannibal drove.

"Living things have a remarkable ability to connect with that which is unlike them. Why else would we have domesticated so many creatures? Both creatures sacrifice an aspect of themselves, not in its entirety, but in relation to the other, so that they may coexist. We are constantly changing, both within ourselves and in others' perceptions of us. Tell me, Will, do you find yourself changing in your perception of yourself?"

Will laughed, a bitter, bitten off thing, shaking his head. He wasn't changing, he was the farthest thing from unrecognizable. He was just learning himself better, coming to accept what he always was. What he was always willing to be.

"Pull over."

"Pardon?" Hannibal glanced at him, curious.

"Pull over, now."

He pulled over to the side of the road, their surroundings obscured by the down pouring rain. Will took a breath, not to steady himself, but because he'd been taught to in class, and punched Hannibal square in the face.

His head snapped back, and a hand went to his face, cradling his jaw as he stared at Will, blank faced. Unsure what emotion to show, unsure what emotion to feel.

Will shook his hand out, feeling the tingle on his knuckles from hitting Hannibal's cheek.

"Feel better?" Hannibal asked, hand still on his jaw.

Will smiled, all teeth. He did feel better, having done that. He should punch Hannibal more often, it felt good to hurt someone who'd fucked him over.

"Fuck you."

Several emotions crossed Hannibal's face, each one fleeting. Maybe he hadn't actually had any idea that Will knew, because he certainly didn't seem to understand why Will was acting like this.

"If I did something-"

"D'you need a whole list?", Will sneered, his accent thicker then ever, a combination of anger and too much alcohol, but he was just starting, "you fucking lied to me, for one, over and

over. You're gonna make me look like an idiot to everyone I work with, or get me arrested, and- fuck! I could get arrested, you asshole. You fucking fed me, for months, and those stupid jokes. God, I can't believe you've gotten away with all those jokes."

Hannibal had frozen, staring at Will. It took him a moment, slowed by the alcohol, to figure out why. He'd just told Hannibal he knew. Fuck. Shit. Maybe he could just punch Hannibal again, hard enough to make him forget the last thirty seconds.

"Will," Hannibal started, then stopped. Still processing Will's outburst. Fuck, Will felt sick. And then the last few drinks made themself known, and he actually felt sick. Eyes widening, Will scrambled for the door, unlocking it and falling to his knees to start puking.

Behind him, he heard Hannibal scramble, then freeze. Distantly, because he was currently far more concerned with the vomiting, he realized that Hannibal had thought, for a moment, that Will was trying to run away. He wanted to make a comment about that, but started puking again before the whole thought could form. Finally, he pushed himself back to lean against the tire of Hannibal's car, suddenly exhausted. He could just close his eyes for a second, and then deal with the mess he'd made of their friendship. One single second. A long blink. Eyes closed.

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He woke up in bed, tucked into creamy silk sheets. Groaning, he reached for the glass of water that had been placed on the bedside table, swallowing half of it in one go. His head was pounding, his eyes hurt to open, and his mouth felt gross. He'd drunk way too much last night. What the hell had happened?

He'd finished his last report, left his office long after everyone else. He'd gone to a bar, stayed there… a while. And then… Hannibal. He'd picked Will up, they'd been driving, and- fuck. Will had gotten pissed, and let it slip that he knew who Hannibal was. He'd punched him, for fucks sake.

And he was… fine. Alive, tucked into bed with a glass of water nearby. Wearing dark gray pajamas instead of his clothes from yesterday. Not dead, missing organs. He felt tempted to check for surgery scars, evidence Hannibal had taken something anyway, but it was half hysterical. He, objectively, should not be alive. Hannibal killed people he didn't like, people he found boring or rude. People who, for instance, insulted him, punched him, and then puked near his car, and probably got puke inside his car as well, if he was now inside Hannibal's house.

The sun was shining through the window, at a steep enough angle that it was late in the morning. He'd slept in. He stumbled to the bathroom connected to the bedroom, brushing his teeth and trying to make himself feel more like a human, and less like something soaked in alcohol and run over by several trucks. It mostly worked, the water helped.

Then he was sitting on the bed, wondering what to do next. The obvious answer was to go downstairs. Hannibal was likely awake. He didn't particularly want to have that particular conversation, though. The other option was jumping from the window and making a break

for it, wearing only the pajamas Hannibal had dressed him in. It was incredibly tempting, he had always been fond of avoidance.

He'd technically already gotten past the first hurdle, of telling Hannibal he knew. He'd also, if he remembered correctly, heavily implied that if Hannibal got arrested, Will would too. Which implied that Will wouldn't turn him in, and would remain close enough to Hannibal to also be arrested. None of which he'd actually thought about sober. He couldn't disagree with drunk Will though. Leaving Hannibal would be nearly as bad as sending him to prison. He'd grown too close to Hannibal for that, he was a plant intertwined at the roots, pulling one would kill the other. Downstairs it was.

Hannibal was in the kitchen, plating a breakfast he'd just finished cooking. He glanced up as Will came down the stairs, watching him carefully. There was a bruise blooming purple and black along his jaw, Will noticed with pride. Go, drunk Will.

"Good morning, Will. How did you sleep?" He set the plates at the dining table, gesturing for Will to sit. It looked good, classic American, eggs and fancy toast, potatoes cubes, links of homemade sausage.

Will stared at it. Drunk him may have been more concerned with personal image, but he still wasn't… wasn't okay with this. He couldn't just eat people, right? It was wrong, it was disgusting. That had been a person, with hopes and dreams and a job.

It was also a test, of sorts. Hannibal had let him live, dressed him and tucked him into bed, but he could still kill Will, technically. It didn't feel like that though, life or death. It felt more like the test was of Will's acceptance. Will could say no, and the only punishment would be Hannibal's disappointment.He could leave, and he wasn't sure Hannibal would even stop him. He didn't have to sit down, he wasn't forced to bring the fork to his lips.

The sausage was delicious. Hannibal's answering smile was even better.

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